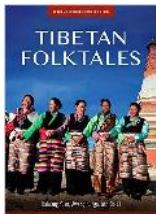


## REVIEW: TIBETAN FOLKTALES (WORLD FOLKLORE SERIES)

Reviewed by: Christine Murphy  
(University of California, Santa Barbara)



Haiwang Yuan, Awang Kunga, and Bo Li. 2014. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO LLC. 202. ISBN: 9781610694704 (hardcover, 38USD)

*Tibetan Folktales* brings a welcome addition to the well-respected *World Folklore Series*, published by Libraries Unlimited, an imprint of ABC-CLIO LLC. The primary author, Haiwang Yuan, Professor of Library Public Services at Western Kentucky University, has also written two other texts in the series, *The Magic Lotus Lantern and Other Tales from the Han Chinese*, and *Princess Peacock: Tales from the Other Peoples of China*, winner of the 2009 Aesop Accolade Award for the Children's Section of the American Folklore Society.

Yuan divides his translation into three parts. The first, an introductory overview, includes photographs and explanations of traditional Tibetan clothing, architecture, calendars, festivals, and other cultural elements. These brief commentaries, each one to two pages in length, are written in a comfortable, accessible style. Yuan offers suggestions for further reading at the end of each commentary, as well as a selection of black and white photos to accompany his descriptions.

The second section focuses on traditional Tibetan food, crafts, and games for children. Including recipes for butter tea, tsampa, and traditional noodle soup, it succeeds as a fun, practical approach to bring elements of Tibetan culture into Western homes. Explanations for children's sports and artistic activities, such as making dolls and necklaces, provide opportunities for primary school teachers or parents to incorporate enjoyable cultural exploration into their classrooms or homes.

The third section, comprising the majority of the book, contains thirty individual folktales gathered and translated by the authors across the Tibet Autonomous Region and beyond. The authors acknowledge the challenge of choosing stories from the extraordinary breadth of the Tibetan literary canon. In the Tibetan context, folktales are found in fictional narratives, religious documents, historical texts, and hagiographies, in addition to the Murphy, Christine. 2016. Review: Tibetan Folktales (World Folklore Series). *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 40:535-537.

extensive oral tradition. Given this seemingly impossible task, the authors have succeeded in choosing a wide variety of folktales, incorporating tragic love stories, ghost stories, fables, and epics that offer the casual reader a light and enjoyable introduction to Tibetan genres, and cultural representations. The authors also omit the use of standard Wylie transliteration, and instead choose simplified Romanizations of proper nouns for reader accessibility, although the dialect on which the Romanization is based in not specified.

The folktales are divided into seven sections: origins, animals, heroes, magic, places, romance, and morality. Sketches and simple drawings are scattered throughout the pages. Including well-known classics, such as the creation myth of the monkey and the ogress, as well as a summary of the King Gesar epic, the authors also include some little known stories which will delight and amuse even seasoned Tibetologists. Sometimes funny, sometimes sad, the selection is diverse enough to entertain most interests.

Limited to 200 pages, the book does not have the opportunity to extend beyond a cursory introduction to Tibetan culture and traditions, or to include more than a sampling of Tibetan folktales; however, it does not purport to. The brief treatment of twentieth century history in Tibet, in particular the ongoing Chinese-Tibetan conflict, may raise eyebrows. Given the aim of the book as a cursory introduction to Tibetan culture for children and interested adults, some may argue that this can be omitted.

Another potential criticism of the text lies in the choice of source material for the folktales. Yuan seems to have chosen the stories from solely Chinese-language publications. Many of the stories come from the *Dictionary of Chinese Folk Literature*. There are minimal references to ethnographic data collection, though Yuan expresses gratitude to several friends for helping him with research trips to Lhasa and the Tibet Autonomous Region in the Acknowledgement section of the book. This discrepancy may leave one wondering about the prudence of this choice. Without such references, the extent to which the chosen folktales remain in popular circulation remains in question. One could extend this dilemma further by questioning the accuracy with which the original Tibetan folktales were recorded and reproduced in Chinese, particularly when the political difficulties in the area are taken into account.

The strength of the book lies in its accessible, friendly prose, attractive drawings and photos, and diverse selection of brief folktales from the Tibetan Plateau. *Tibetan Folktales* is an excellent

addition to a children's library, and as a resource for individuals interested in an introduction to multiple aspects of Tibetan culture.

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<sup>1</sup> Given as cited.